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THE PRONUNCIATION AND SPELLING OF HUÍDO AND SIMILAR WORDS

The question has been raised and ably discussed by Professor S. Griswold Morley, in the October (1921) number of *HISPANIA* (pages 187-191), whether *huído*, *substituído*, etc., should be written with or without the accent mark. Professor Morley holds that the accent is quite out of place.

The problem, however, is not so simple as it might appear at first sight. The written accent on *huído*, *huída*, etc., would indicate that in these words the *u* and the *i* form separate syllables. This raises at once the question whether *huído*, for instance, is properly pronounced *uido* or *wido*. The poets usually count *huído* as a word of three syllables. To this statement the objection may be raised that we are considering not the usage of poets but the daily speech of the average cultivated man and woman. This is true, but it is also a fact that the language of verse is nearer to normal fluid speech than is the formal and precise language of oratorical prose. For instance, a poet writes:

"Que mi cantar sonoro
Acompañó hasta aquí; no aprisionado . . ."

In the poem the second line is properly read with only eleven syllables. In the normal fluid speech of every-day life if these words were uttered without self-consciousness on the part of the speaker, they would also form eleven syllables, neither *more* nor less. Like the poet, the ordinary man would say *acompañó hasta aquí*. On the other hand, in formal emphatic prose an orator might say *acompañó - hasta - aquí* without any synalepha at all. For this and other reasons it seems to me that the usage of poets does to a large degree indicate the normal pronunciation.

Sr. Navarro Tomás, in his *Pronunciación española* (pp. 198-199), gives "como si estremara la huída," which he renders in phonetic script as follows: "komo sj estremára la uída." Under the *u* of *uída* there is the same curved line that is used beneath the *u* of *lo uniko* on page 211. This curved line and the bracket indicate that in *la uída* the first *a* and the *u* form a diphthong, as do the first *o* and the *u* of *lo uniko*. This pronunciation is certainly that of most cultivated Spaniards and Spanish Americans, although in careless speech the *ui* may sometimes become *wi*, especially in such combinations as *substituído*.

It is an interesting fact that, although there are many Spanish words that begin with *ue-* (written *hue-*), there are none that begin with *ua-* (*hua-*), or *uo-* (*huo-*), and only one series that begins with *ui-* (*hui-*), namely *huir* and its derivatives. There are, to be sure, some words of Indian origin that begin with *ua-* (*hua-*), or *ui-* (*hui-*), such as the Chilean *huaso*, but none of these is indigenous to Spain. That is to say, the only Spanish words that begin with *u* plus another vowel are (1) those that begin with *ue-* (*hue-*) and (2) *huir* and its derivatives.

In the case of the words beginning with *ue-*, the *u* is regularly a semi-consonant as in *hueso* (*weso*). Comparing the sound of this *w* with that of *u* in *causa*, etc., Sr. Navarro Tomás (§ 68) says: "Los labios se aproximan más entre sí y la lengua se acerca más al velo del paladar, resultando, según predomine la estrechez en uno u otro punto, una *g* labializada o una *b* velarizada: 'ahuecar' - *awekár*, *agwekár* o *abwekár*; el habla vulgar, en casos de posición inicial absoluta, llega a convertir la estrechez en una verdadera oclusión: 'huevo' - *gwébo* o *bwébo*, etc."

In the words that begin with *ue-*, such as *hueso* (for the *h* is silent), the initial *w* is, then, more or less fricative, or consonantal, and in dialect stories it is not unusual to see *hueso* written *güeso*. This spelling is far from accurate, but it is an attempt to express in writing the fricative nature of the initial *w*.

All Spanish words that begin with *ue-* (*hue-*) have this more or less fricative *w*. I say "more or less" because the amount of fricativeness varies with different speakers. There are no words that begin with *ua-* (*hua*) or *uo-* (*huo-*).

In the consideration of words beginning with *u* plus another vowel, we now have left only *huir* and its derivatives, *huído*, *huída*, etc. In this group of words, does the initial *u* represent an *u*, or does it represent the more or less fricative *w* of *weso* (*gweso*), etc., which has been described above? Or, to state the question differently and with the terms used by Sr. Navarro Tomás, does *huído* have the "u semi-vocal" of *causa*, *lo único*, etc., or the "u semi-consonante" of *weso* (*gweso*), *wébo* (*gwebo*), etc.? We have seen in the phonetic script of page 198 that when Sr. Navarro Tomás writes *la huída* he uses the "u semi-vocal" of *lo único* and *causa*.

The persistence of an initial *u*, instead of the fricative *w*, in *huído*, etc., may be due, at least in part, to the fact that in the forms *huyo*, *huyes*, etc., *huya*, *huyas*, etc., the *u* is stressed. By analogy,

the *u* of *huído* would resemble the *u* of *huyo*, while *construyo* would influence *construído*, etc.

The other question to consider is whether the Royal Spanish Academy acted wisely in choosing the accent mark instead of the dieresis to indicate the pronunciation of *huído*, etc. Would it be better to write *hüído*? There may have been two reasons that led the Academy to choose *huído* rather than *hüído*. In the first place, with the present system of Spanish orthography, the dieresis on *u* is generally used only to indicate that *u* is pronounced where otherwise it would be silent, as in *argüir*.

In the second place, the vowels *ui*, in the opinion of the Academy, are pronounced in three different ways, as in *flúido*, *cuido* (*kwido*), and *huído*. It is true that in ordinary conversation cultivated Spaniards say *flúido* instead of *flüido* just as they say *período* instead of *periódo*, but the Academy gives official sanction to *flúido* and *período*. Now, shall the three words mentioned above be spelled *flúido*, *cuido*, and *huído*, or would it be better to write *flüido*, *cuido*, and *hüído*? Or should we write *huído* without any distinguishing mark whatever? The Academy chose the series *flúido*, *cuido*, *huído*. This may not be perfectly logical or entirely consistent. I am not sure in my own mind. But, in any case, the decision has been made by the academicians, and it does not seem to me to be at all bad.

I am quite willing to grant that a written accent on *huir* would make for consistency. The Academy may have thought that in a word of two syllables such as *huir* the written accent was unnecessary, as the second and final syllable ends in a consonant. But if this be true of *huir*, it would seem equally so with regard to *oír*. Perhaps, in the next edition of their dictionary, the academicians may decide to write *huir*. In fact, so good an academician as Don Francisco Rodríguez Marín uses the accent even on *argüir* (see his critical edition of *Don Quijote*, Vol. I, page 159, note).

In this connection there is still another point to be considered. I am not convinced that it would be advisable for an American publishing house to print *hüído* or *huído*, *oscuro*, *sustituir*, etc., in its textbooks. Some editors might prefer these forms. Other editors would certainly insist on *huído*, *oscuro*, *substituir*, etc., in accord with the rules of the Academy, and the result would be that the publishers would use in their textbooks two or more spellings for each of several words. This would cause confusion and would not be good pedagogy.

It is generally acknowledged, I believe, that the majority of Spanish-speaking people the world over pronounce *estremo* for *extremo*, *estraño* for *extraño*, etc. (Sr. Navarro Tomás gives *estremara* for *extremara* on page 199 of his *Pronunciación española*.) Now, if one editor of a textbook should insist on the use of *oscuro*, *sustituir*, etc., I see no valid reason why another should not with equal right insist on the use of *estremo*, *estraño*, etc. This spelling might be the more phonetic, but it would lead to confusion in the minds of our students. It would be decidedly better for a publishing house to use in all its books one spelling and one only for each word, and I should favor that sanctioned by the Academy in view of the fact that it is taught in all Spanish schools and in most of the schools of Spanish America.

When we English-speaking people discuss seriously the logic, or the lack of it, in the Academy's spelling of certain words, such as *huido* vs. *huido*, *obscur* vs. *oscuro*, etc., I fancy I can see our Spanish friends smiling ironically. It must certainly seem queer to them that we should even take an interest in such matters, when most of us continue to use without the slightest protest such an illogical, inconsistent and unscientific spelling as that of *go*, *though*, *mow*, *scw*, *hoe*, etc., or *too*, *to*, *through*, *threw*, *rue*, etc.

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